

Argentina has the largest Jewish population in Latin America. Estimates of its size vary greatly, from under 300,000 to over 450,000. Over the past fifty years, at least, anti-Semitic attitudes in some parts of the population have existed and still persist. These attitudes and prejudices are similar to those that have existed in many other nations and cultures, especially those heavily influenced by religious and nationalistic attitudes widespread before the ecumenical movement began to take root. On occasion these attitudes have helped nourish a more systematic kind of anti-Semitism, associated among other things with violent acts against the Jewish community. The early part of this century, the 1940's, and the 1960's witnessed particularly severe episodes of this kind of violence.

There is no official policy of anti-Semitism, as the OAS Human Rights Commission reported after its visit to Argentina in 1979. This is the opinion of almost every qualified observer of Argentina. Jews of Argentina exercise their religion without restraint. They have a well-organized and active community life. They participate fully in Argentina's economic and cultural life. They are free to emigrate. We understand Jews can legally collect and remit money to Israel, for the first time. The mandatory civics course which all children must take has been modified, reflecting a protest by the Jewish community. For all these reasons, attempts to create analogies between the situation of Argentine and Soviet Jews quickly collapses, and is in fact rejected by most of the Jewish community in Argentina.

Argentine Jews form a significant number of those who have disappeared or are detained as a result of the anti-terrorism, anti-subversive campaign conducted by the security forces. However, most observers do not believe this situation reflects an effort to single the Jews out as victims. Rather, the terrorists and other groups that were the object of the security forces' actions recruited most of their members from the politicized, educated and intellectual sectors in which Jews were also well represented. At the same time, there are persistent reports that detained and disappeared Jews were severely persecuted as Jews, rather than as alleged subversives or terrorists, by some elements of the security forces.

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Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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are cited to document the existence of anti-Semitism, both that of a persistent cultural nature and the more virulent type which is organized: Jewish schools and facilities were attacked during a mini-wave of bombing attempts in mid-1980; viciously anti-Semitic publications, sold in small-numbers, circulate freely; an interview last year on a government-run television station which was perceived by many as anti-Semitic, though not by the Jewish interviewee; the refusal of the Government to broadcast the TV program "Holocaust," a refusal reportedly based on the claim that the broadcast would stir up the small groups of anti-Semitic activists to action.

Together these elements have raised the question by some of the Government's attitude towards anti-Semitism. Critics argue that the Government could and should do more to combat these manifestations. Others argue that for the most part those responsible for these actions are beyond the reach of responsible decision-makers in the Government. The OAS Human Right Commission concluded that the anti-Semitism that has broken out on a number of occasions in Argentina comes from fanatical groups that are outside the Government's responsibility, adding that the Government has the duty to control those groups.

President Videla and spokesmen for his Government sought to dissociate his administration from anti-Semitism, condemning the attitude. In his appearance before the Senate and House Foreign Relations Committee in March 1981, then President-designate Viola stated that the Argentine Government was aware of anti-Semitic incidents and had adopted energetic methods against anti-Semitism. He reiterated his conviction that the Argentine Jewish Community engages in its activities on an equal level with other Argentine citizens.

Argentina and Israel maintain full diplomatic, economic and cultural relations. Argentina does not recognize the PLO and there is no PLO office in Argentina. Israel is an important supplier of arms and other military equipment to Argentina.